

MA THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

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PRESS RELEASE

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THE THIRD DIMENSION: SCULPTURE OF THE NEW YORK SCHOOL
August 21-October 13, 1985

The Third Dimension: Sculptors of the New York School presents more than 50 works by 21 American sculptors working in the years between 1945 and 1965. On view at The Cleveland Museum of Art from August 21 through October 13, 1985, the exhibition was organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and based on a smaller, earlier Whitney exhibition titled "Sculpture in the Age of Painting."

The premise of the exhibition--that important abstract sculpture was overshadowed during the postwar years by abstract painting and now warrants careful study--spurred its organizer, Whitney curator Lisa Phillips, to bring together sculptures that shared the concerns and techniques of the contemporary, and much more celebrated, abstract paintings. The terms Abstract Expressionist and "action" painting were attached to the paintings. Characteristics of the paintings can apply equally to the sculptures: their dynamic, open, penetrating forms are like gestures in space, giving a literal dimension to the implied space of the painters. Movement was introduced, within the piece (as in Alexander Calder's mobiles) or through it (as in the environments created by Louise Nevelson and Louise Bourgeois), supplanting the immobility of traditional sculpture. Material was as unorthodox as style: rubber, plastic, cloth, steel and assorted industrial metals, as well as discarded "junk," became the stuff of art.

Included among these 21 artists are Calder, Nevelson, Isamu Noguchi, David Smith--all now so well known that it is difficult to imagine their work overshadowed, even by the paintings of Willem de Kooning or Jackson Pollock. An Abstract

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Expressionist painter, supposedly Ad Reinhardt, is reported to have defined sculpture as "the thing you back into when you look at a painting."

Like the painters, the sculptors of the New York School found their original sources of inspiration in Cubism, Constructivism, and Surrealism—all European art movements of the early 20th century. In addition, a number of these sculptors were deeply interested and well trained in science: Calder earned a degree as a mechanical engineer, Herbert Ferber and Seymour Lipton in dentistry, David Hare and Noguchi were pre-med students. The atrocities of World War II further affected the way these artists approached abstraction in their work and what they wished to convey through it. Over a 20-year period, when New York was, suddenly and for the first time, the center of the art world, sculptors created works that clearly and powerfully shared preoccupations common not only to Abstract Expressionist painting but also to architecture, theatre, and literature of the time.

Yet they disavowed a common style and rhetoric, so that their works are as varied as their backgrounds: Nevelson was born in Russia, Smith and John Chamberlain in small Indiana towns, Calder into a family of artists, Ibram Lassaw in Egypt to Russian parents, Noguchi into a heritage half Japanese, half Scotch-Irish. But their individual talents and ambitions forged them into what can legitimately be called a school of sculpture that expressed a particular modern sensibility.

A catalogue (112 pages, fully illustrated, \$11) provides an essay placing the 21 sculptors in context, biographical entries, and a chronology; it is available at the Museum Bookstore. Members of the Museum's Education Department will offer lectures and gallery talks throughout the exhibition, and a series of films on modern sculpture will run on Wednesdays in the lecture hall, beginning September 4.

The exhibition, which was made possible by a generous grant from the National Committee of the Whitney Museum and is supported in Cleveland by the Ohio Arts Council, is coordinated at the Cleveland Museum by Tom Hinson.